

FCC Consumer Advisory Committee
Recommendation Regarding DTV Closed Captioning and Video Description

The Commission Should Take Immediate and Ongoing Actions to Resolve Problems Associated with the Provision of Closed Captions and Video Description Provided on Digital Television Programming. In light of the rapidly approaching cessation of analog transmissions nationwide, the FCC should take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that individuals who rely on closed captioning and video description are not cut off from access to emergency information and other televised material when the DTV transition takes place. To achieve this, the CAC recommends the following actions:

1. The Commission should immediately conduct an assessment of current and anticipated problems associated with the transmission and display of digital captioning and video description. This effort should involve gathering information on how to resolve these problems, as well as making this information publicly available on an expedited and ongoing basis, through an information clearinghouse and other measures. In this manner, all interested parties, including engineers, manufacturers, programming distributors, and consumers, would have access to available technical solutions.

2. As part of the effort to achieve number one (1) above, the Commission should convene a technical working group on digital closed captioning and video description that includes representatives from the broadcast, cable and satellite industries, manufacturers of consumer electronics, manufacturers of equipment used in or connected with the processing and encoding of captions and video description, consumer electronic retailers, captioning and video description providers, and consumers of captioning and video description. The working group would:

- Identify current and anticipated problems with the transmission and display of digital captioning and video description;
- Evaluate the captioning and video description capabilities of digital equipment and;
- Develop solutions to ensure that captions and video description are passed through intact to the consumer.

3. The Commission should assume a leadership role in ensuring that TV station engineers receive the guidance and assistance they need to correct technical problems related to closed captioning and video description as these solutions are developed.

4. The Commission should step up its enforcement of existing closed captioning obligations that already apply to DTV manufacturers and distributors of DTV programming under the Commission's rules.

5. The Commission should appoint dedicated staff in its call center(s) to respond specifically to questions and concerns associated with the transmission and display of closed captioning and video description.

Adopted: January 30, 2009 (three abstentions)

Debra R. Berlyn, Chairperson
Consumer Advisory Committee